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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes data for students participating in the Transition Sixth (T-6) Dropout Prevention program in Broward County Public Schools, Florida, from the 1987-88 to 1990-91 school years. The T-6 program uses an early intervention strategy designed to reduce the dropout rate by allowing selected over-age fourth graders to master skills required for fifth and sixth grade in one academic year. Performance indicators for the analysis described in this report included annual attendance, report card grades, suspension rates, frequency of promotion, IOWA test scores, measures of student attitudes, and frequency of parent visitation. Findings show that the T-6 program has a strong positive effect on participants, and that T-6 student performance improves over time, with T-6 participants outperforming control group students in a majority of areas. Ten tables of data and eight charts are included. (MM)

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Transition Sixth (T-6) Review: An Effective Dropout Prevention Program 1987-88 through 1990-91

Katherine Blasik, Ph.D., Cary Sutton, Mark Thomas and Fran Merenstein

The Broward County School District, Florida created the Transition Sixth Program (T6) as an early intervention strategy to reduce the dropout rate. In 1985-86, 682,000 American teenagers dropped out of schools - an average of 3,789 per day (Educating At-Risk Youth, 1988). Broward County was no exception. The 1987 dropout rate was 12% which translated into over 3,000 dropouts in Broward County for that year. The impact of these numbers becomes evident when one considers that it has been estimated that each class of dropouts will cost the nation more than $240 billion in lost earnings and foregone taxes over their lifetimes (Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, 1989). In reaction to these alarming statistics, Broward County began to research the effects of three variables on dropout rates; overage for grade, retention and poor academic success.

Being overage in the eighth grade (as a result of being held back in earlier grades) is a strong indicator that a student will drop out (Hammack, 1987). Various studies have reinforced this premise. These studies of overage students have concluded that students who entered high school one year overage were much more likely to drop out than normal ages students (60% versus 37%) and those entering two or more years overage drop out at a 69% rate (Hess & Greer, 1985).

Directly linked to the variable of overage is the variable of retention. The bulk of literature on elementary school grade retention suggests that the effects of retention are more deleterious than those of promotion (Cross, 1988). The dropout rate escalates rapidly as the number of times retained increases (Morris, 1989). Being retained one grade increases the risk of dropping out later by 40-50%, two grades by 90% (Mann, 1986). Furthermore, research suggests that retention has little benefit for students beyond the sixth grade (Cross, 1988). Thus, the overage and retention variables became the cornerstone for the Transition Sixth Program strategy. Creating an

alternative for students two or more years overage for grade and who have been retained at least once in elementary school was the impetus for Transition 6.

Poor grades are likewise a major factor in why students drop out of school. The evidence is quite clear and nearly unequivocal. Achievement and adjustment of retained children are no better, and in most cases worse, than those of comparable children who are promoted (Smith & Shepard, 1987). These children feel a sense of failure. To escape this failure, the academically unsuccessful student simply drops out.

Overage for grade, retained and academically unsuccessful students in eleven of Broward County's elementary schools were given an option to help them remain in school - the Transition Sixth Program.

Summary

The report summarizes data for students identified as participating in the Transition 6 (T-6) Dropout Prevention program since T-6 was initiated in Broward County Public Schools, FL in the 1987-88 school year. The performance indicators of annual attendance, reportcard grades, suspension rates, promotion frequency, IOWA test scores, student attitudes, and parent visitation were targeted. The major finding of the review is that the T-6 program is having a strong positive effect on participants as per the performance indicators. Further, findings demonstrate that T-6 student performance is improving over time with the T-6 participants outperforming the comparison group students in a majority of indicator areas.

Introduction

Since 1987-88, Broward County Public School staff have implemented a Dropout Prevention (DOP) program which enables qualified overage-for-grade fourth grade completers to enter middle school rather than remain at the elementary level. Called Transition 6 (T-6), the program is designed to allow select students the opportunity to master 5th and 6th grade required skills in one academic year. Students are supported by a 22:1 student-teacher ratio, individual and group counseling, peer counseling/tutoring and frequent family involvement. Successful participants then advance to the 7th grade the following year. The report reviews four years of information about T-6, 1987-88 through 1990-91.

The major research question posed in the report addresses whether the T-6 program was the better alternative for the participants when comparing progress made by a control group who remained in elementary school the additional year. The research design made it possible to track four years of data for a control group that was matched by demographic characteristics to the group of students served by the T-6 program between 1987-88 through 1990-91. Data analyzed included daily attendance, reportcard grades, suspension incidence, promotion rates, IOWA test scores, positive attitude toward school rate, and parent visit frequency (non-disciplinary related).

The first section of the report presents student enrollment information. The second section documents available performance indicator data. The third section highlights a brief discussion of findings.

Student Enrollment

Demographic Information. Table 1 summarizes several characteristics of the students served by T-6 programs from 1987-88 through 1990-91. Only students who made the transition from grade four to grade six and who participated in the countywide testing program were included in Table 1.

Most of the information in the following table is self explanatory. The most recent available IQ score was used. The IOWA scores were group averages converted to percentile ranks based on local norms. The average IOWA score for all students in the county at each grade level in 1986 was set at the fiftieth percentile rank (half scored higher, half scored lower). The result in Table 1 shows that the fourth grade percentile rank score for the 1987-88 group of T-6 pupils was thirty with an increase to forty-fourth percentile rank in 1990-91. The increase in the achievement level of participants each year since 1987-88 is the most evident trend in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Number of Students and
Demographics for T-6 Groups by Years

	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Number	47	166	109	212
% Free Lunch	83%	76%	78%	77%
% Male	72%	52%	49%	53%
% Black	52%	65%	61%	65%
2 Years Overage For Grade	85%	72%	69%	66%
Average IQ	84	86	88	88
IOWA Pctl Rank	30	36	37	44

Selection of Comparison Groups

The critical issue in this evaluation is whether the T-6 students would have best benefitted had they remained in elementary school for an additional year. The comparison procedures were designed to address this question.

The control group consisted of all students who received FTE funds for participation in a DOP program since 1987-88. All students on this data base who entered the sixth grade in 1987-88 (after attending the fifth grade in 1986-87 and the fourth grade in 1985-86) were selected as the initial control group. The students also were required to have participated in the countywide testing program in 1986. Those who took the test as exceptional education or bilingual students were not included in the study.

A composite T-6 group was selected by combining the data for pupils who participated in T-6 between 1987-1990. The design was further refined by using a matching procedure that weighted the control group in proportion to the composite T-6 group on sex, race, free lunch status, years overage-for-grade, and three IOWA achievement test intervals.

Table 2 shows the results of the weighting. One sees that the control group exactly matched the composite T-6 group on the categorical sex, race, free lunch and overage-for-grade variables. However, the IOWA test results were continuous measures. The test results had to be converted to categorical variables before the weighting

procedures could be applied. A frequency distribution of IOWA scores for the composite T-6 group was consulted to classify the fourth grade IOWA results of the composite group into three intervals. The T-6 and control groups were equated on these intervals. Table 2 shows that this equating did not remove all of the between group difference in initial achievement on the IOWA. The composite T-6 group scored at the thirty-sixth percentile rank and the control group scored at the thirty-second percentile rank.

TABLE 2
Composite Comparison Groups

	Control	T-6
Number	322	322
% Free Lunch	78%	78%
% Male	53%	53%
% Black	62%	62%
2 Years Overage	73%	73%
Average IQ	85	87
IOWA Pctl Rank	32	36

1991 Enrollment Status of Pupils in Grade Six in 1987-88. Table 3 and Chart 1 provide information about the enrollment status of T-6 and control group students four years after leaving elementary school. As the 1987-88 T-6 group is small the findings offer only preliminary indications of potential long term outcomes.

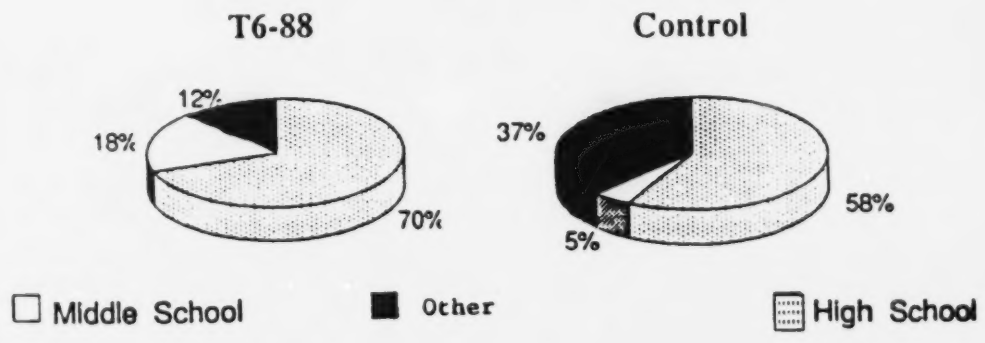
Most of the T-6 and the control group students entered the ninth grade in 1991. Initial findings suggest that a larger percentage of T-6 participants attended middle and high school programs in 1990-91 when compared to students in the control group (88%; 63%). In addition, data indicates that a smaller percentage of T-6 students enrolled in funded DOP programs in later years when compared to the control group (33%; 57%).

TABLE 3
1991 Enrollment Status of Pupils in Grade 6 in 1987-88

	Control	T-6
Initial Enrollment	276	47
Withdrew	n/a	7 (15%)
Remained in School	276	40
High	160 (58%)	28 (70%)
Middle	13 (5%)	7 (18%)
Other*	103 (37%)	5 (12%)
Participating in DOP Program	153 (57%)	13 (33%)

* Includes participation in programs offered at sites such as centers.

CHART 1
Percent of 1988 Sixth Graders Still Enrolled in School-Based Programs



Performance Indicators

As the intent of DOP is to enable students to succeed in school in order to graduate, the performance indicators addressed in the report include categories of attendance, academics (Grade Point Average - GPA), suspension, and promotion rates. In addition, IOWA percentile ranks, percent student positive attitudes, and percent parent visits, non-disciplinary related, were addressed.

The following tables and charts present trends in performance indicators for grade six and the three subsequent years. The 1987-88 T-6 group participants include only a pool of 40 students which is a small and fragmented sampling and which is not typical of the groups selected in subsequent years. Consequently, the performance indicators for Year 4 do not provide reliable information for a fourth year longitudinal review. The Year 4 data is included in the following tables to provide a preliminary indication of possible longitudinal outcomes. Year 4 findings will be reliable when multiple year participants are available for the study.

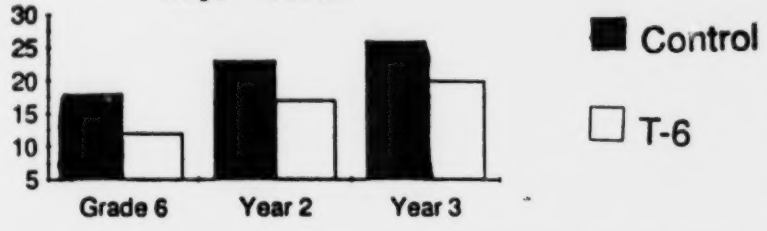
Attendance. Table 4 and Chart 2 report average days absent pro-rated over a 180 day school year.

Findings. T-6 students were absent fewer days than the control groups. T-6 participants attended 6 more days of school per year when compared to the control group attendance. Both groups increase days absent at the same rate of 5 days in year 2 and 3 days in year 3.

TABLE 4
Days Absent by Year

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	18	23	26	31
T-6	12	17	20	23
T-6; 87/88	14	17	21	23
T-6; 88/89	11	15	20	
T-6; 89/90	14	18		
T-6; 90/91	13			

CHART 2
Days Absent

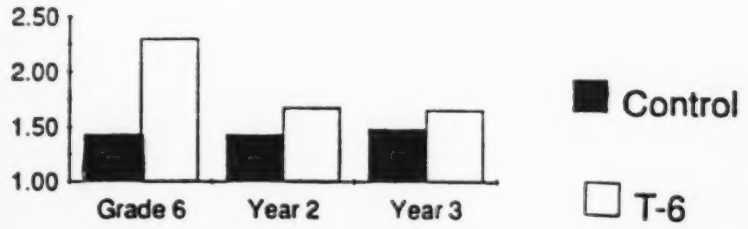


Reportcard Grades. The indicator shows the Grade Point Average (GPA) as calculated at the end of each academic year. During grade 6 and the two subsequent years, T-6 group averages were higher than 1.5. The T-6 groups maintained a C average while in the sixth grade. Their grades dropped after the sixth grade, however, they maintained a higher GPA than the control group after leaving the sixth grade. The grades of T-6 groups were higher than those obtained by the corresponding control groups at each year interval.

TABLE 5
GPA

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	1.43	1.43	1.48	1.19
T-6	2.30	1.67	1.65	1.26
T-6; 87-88	2.40	1.36	1.53	1.26
T-6; 88/89	2.22	1.69	1.69	
T-6; 89/90	2.37	1.78		
T-6; 90/91	2.43			

CHART 3
GPA



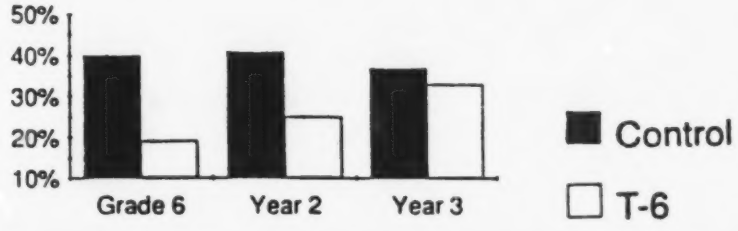
Percent Suspended. The indicator reports the percent of students who were suspended one or more days during the academic year.

Findings. T-6 students were suspended less often than the control group, especially during the first two years they attended middle school. Trends indicate a gradual decrease in suspension rates over time.

TABLE 6
Percent Suspended by Year

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	40%	41%	37%	30%
T-6	19%	25%	33%	28%
T-6; 87/88	21%	26%	34%	28%
T-6; 88/89	20%	26%	33%	
T-6; 89/90	17%	23%		
T-6; 90/91	17%			

CHART 4
Percent Suspended



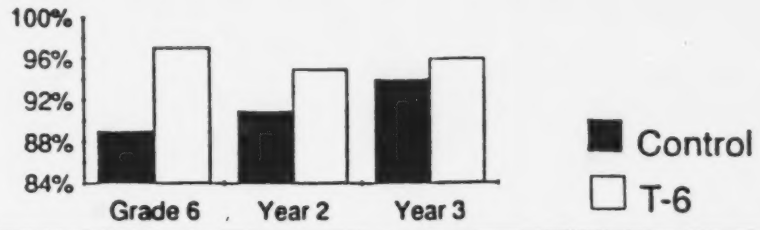
Promotion Rates. Pass-fail rates are determined by looking at longitudinal data to identify the number of pupils who were in the same grade two successive years. No information is available about the promotion status of pupils who withdraw before the start of a new year.

Findings. The percent promoted data showed T-6 students were less likely than control pupils to repeat a middle school grade.

TABLE 7
Percent Promoted

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	89%	91%	94%	78%
T-6	97%	95%	96%	85%
T-6; 87/88	91%	87%	96%	85%
T-6; 88/89	96%	98%	96%	
T-6; 89/90	100%	94%		
T-6; 90/91	100%			

CHART 5
Percent Promoted



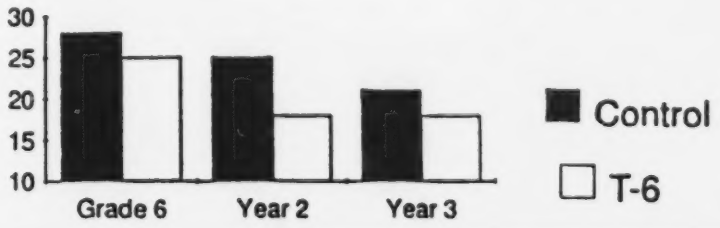
IOWA Percentile Ranks. Table 8 and Chart 6 specify student performance on the IOWA test.

Findings. Trends in IOWA test results favored the control groups. By 1991, only 46% of the control group students took the IOWA tests while 70% of the T-6 group were tested.

TABLE 8
IOWA Percentile Ranks

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	28%	25%	21%	18%
T-6	25%	18%	18%	14%
T-6; 87/88	26%	16%	16%	14%
T-6; 88/89	29%	15%	18%	
T-6; 89/90	32%	24%		
T-6; 90/91	33%			

CHART 6
IOWA Percentile Ranks



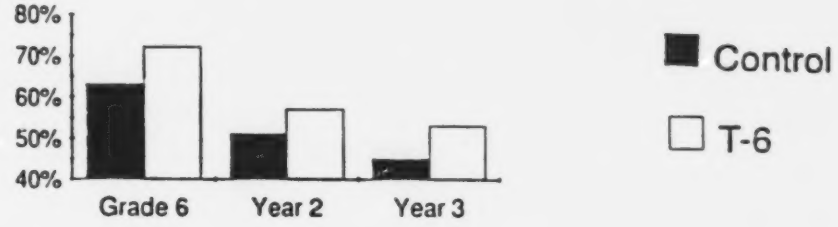
Percent Positive Attitudes Toward School. Based on survey results, the indicator identifies the percent of students who have expressed positive attitudes toward school. Respondants were randomly selected for participation.

Findings. T-6 students tended to like school better than the control group.

TABLE 9
Percent Positive Responses: Attitude

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	63%	51%	45%	59%
T-6	72%	57%	53%	64%
T-6; 87/88	82%	61%	51%	64%
T-6; 88/89	72%	54%	54%	
T-6; 89/90	69%	59%		
T-6; 90/91	70%			

CHART 7
Percent Positive Responses: Attitude



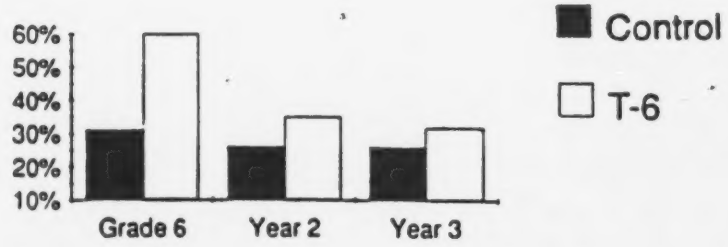
Percent Parent Visits. Based on survey results, parents indicated whether they had visited their child's school *for non-disciplinary reasons* during the academic year.

Findings. The evidence suggests that parents were involved in school activities while T-6 students were enrolled in the sixth grade. The extent of parent visits was greater for T-6 groups than for control groups at yearly intervals.

TABLE 10
Percent Parent Visits

	Grade 6	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Control	31%	26%	26%	26%
T-6	60%	35%	32%	30%
T-6; 87/88	74%	32%	18%	30%
T-6; 88/89	64%	38%	35%	
T-6; 89/90	49%	32%		
T-6; 90/91	49%			

CHART 8
Percent Parent Visits



Discussion

1. Longitudinal contrasts between T-6 groups and the control group showed that the T-6 program was the better alternative. Several findings support the T-6 program as a viable option for meeting the needs of the overage-for-grade at-risk student including:

    - The 1990-91 T-6 group did better on the performance indicators than did the 1988-89 group. Also, the 1988-89 T-6 group performed better than did the 1987-88 group. The data suggests the student performance as per the indicators are improving over time.

    - The strategy of intervening at the fourth grade level greatly reduced the likelihood that the targeted students would later require more extensive interventions.

2. A greater percentage of T-6 students remained in school than the control group. Therefore, one may speculate that selective attrition may have weeded out a higher proportion of less academically capable students from the control than from the T-6 group.

3. Preliminary data on the withdrawal rate of T-6 participants suggests that 15% dropped out of school in 1990-91. The county average for the general population in grades 9-12 is 6.13%. ***However, the 15% rate is significantly lower than the 50-90% dropout rate that researchers suggest is predictable for overage-for-grade students.***

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